

Netcare Unitas Hospital

Against all odds, I survived

Friday, 25 August 2010 The tears of joy were flowing freely at a 'Miracle Babies' reunion held this past Saturday when some of South Africa's youngest, smallest and most unlikely survivors were reunited with nurses and doctors who had helped to save them.

According to Netcare Unitas Hospital Manager, Adelle Johnstone, where the reunion took place, it was held to celebrate the remarkable stories of the babies and small children, many of whom had once been thought to have little chance at life. "Each one of these children's lives was seriously threatened by one medical condition or another and each one managed to pull through, against all odds," says Johnstone.

Lisa Watt, who was present at the reunion, looked back at the time when she had been overjoyed at the birth of her seemingly healthy twins, Owen and Ryan, only to discover that one of them was suffering from a severe respiratory condition and was seriously ill. Ryan was sent to Neo Natal ICU (NNICU) where he received round the clock treatment.

However, as the hours passed his condition worsened and on the third day hospital staff had to inform Lisa that they had done everything they possibly could to save her precious child. All that was left was hope. "Lisa was devastated at the thought of losing her new baby boy so unexpectedly. Yet despite the grim prognosis he made a complete turnaround and was sent home two weeks later, happy and healthy as could be," recalls Johnstone.

Trevor and Antoinette Steenkamp had also had a harrowing experience with the birth of their twins, Hanouw and Treanë. The babies were born at only 24 weeks, two months before they were due. Both were critically ill and weighed between 500 and 700g each. Scans were conducted and certain brain abnormalities were detected. After several months of monitoring the babies, doctors and nurses sent them home without any sure sign of improvement.

Thirteen months later Antoinette made a call to the NNICU with the news that both Hanouw and Treanë were walking. Another scan was conducted and no brain abnormalities appeared whatsoever.

Johnstone explains that while the doctors and nurses in the Netcare Unitas Hospital NNICU do their best to save infants on a daily basis, there are times when there is no

more they can do. "However, our miracle babies are testament to the fact that the dedicated care that our doctors and nurses give to their little patients means there is still a chance, even when it seems as though all hope is lost.

Johnstone says that the 'Miracle Babies' reunion, which was hosted by the hospital's NNICU on Saturday 21 August, brought back some painful memories for the families that attended. But it was also a joyous occasion that gave the families and hospital staff an opportunity to come together again in celebration of the lives of their miracle babies.

"It is always very difficult for parents when their babies have to be in NNICU. During these times, families become very close to the people that are caring for their children. Many of the staff members working in this NNICU have been with us for ten or twenty years. They are truly dedicated to their patients and are a big part of every success that the Netcare Unitas Hospital NNICU has ever had.

"We were extremely touched by some of the messages from the parents at the reunion. One read: 'Thank you for a wonderful morning. Us parents should actually host a function for the staff, to say thank you for all the dedication.' Another said: 'It is amazing that the staff still remember and make time for the children after they are discharged.' One of the miracle babies, who is now a little boy, came in a tuxedo to the function because his family felt it was such an important event.

"The now strong and healthy little survivors thoroughly enjoyed the reunion too; they were treated with gift and sweet packs and spent the morning watching "Finding Nemo", completely oblivious of just how momentous this occasion really was in their young lives. However, one day they will understand just how amazing it is that they are able to say: "Against all odds, I survived."

"Netcare Unitas Hospital was proud to be able to host a 'Miracle Babies' reunion. We promise to provide our community with the same dedicated care that we gave to these children, and will continue to do everything within our power to ensure the wellbeing of our patients at all times," concludes Johnstone.

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